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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [SOCI](#) [KWBG](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE NORTH SINAI
GOVERNORATE

REF: A. CAIRO 107
[1](#)B. CAIRO 163
[1](#)C. CAIRO 657

Classified By: Minister Counselor for Economic and Political Affairs
Donald A. Blome for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Key Points:

-- A National Democratic Party (NDP) Bedouin parliamentary representative for northern and central Sinai and members of the Fawakhriya Bedouin Council said that increased Egyptian security and military measures will not resolve the smuggling of goods, weapons, and people. Instead, peace between Palestinians and Israelis and the development of Bedouin livelihoods is the solution. Absent that, Bedouin resentment and attempts to "embarrass" the Government of Egypt (GoE) would increase.

-- The NDP parliamentarian stated that the extension of the Ismailia canal would provide water to develop the agriculture and animal husbandry industries in central Sinai. The Fawakhriya Bedouin Council members said that current USAID projects would not be enough to create livelihoods to support large, extended Bedouin families.

-- Fawakhriya Bedouin council members said the pullback of Egyptian security in Rafah and El Arish has created a "permissive environment" for increased Bedouin criminal activity.

-- Both the parliamentarian and Bedouin council members asked the USG to provide additional development assistance and encourage the GoE to change the way that it deals with Sinai and the Bedouin population.

[1](#)2. (S/NF) Comment: It was evident that the Egyptian security presence in northern Sinai has been reduced over the past 3-4 months (reftels A-C). We were able to drive into the Egyptian border city of Rafah with little scrutiny from state security or the Egyptian military. However, military security remains extremely tight in central Sinai. Troops at checkpoints were dressed in bullet-proof gear and manned rooftop gun turrets despite the 100-plus degree temperatures.

The Governor of North Sinai and the military security apparatus did not allow us to continue on our central Sinai route from Baghdad to Nakhl. We were forced to return to El Arish and take the northern Sinai road on our return to Cairo. According to our contacts in the Nakhl city council and the Desert Bedouin Association, the Governor of North Sinai forbade them to meet with us, and ordered the closure of council and association offices to guarantee compliance. We also noticed a substantial increase in the amount of refuse in the streets of El Arish, Shaykh Zuwayd, and Rafah as compared to past trips. End Comment

Development and a Peace Treaty Needed to End Smuggling

¶13. (S/NF) NDP parliamentary representative for northern and central Sinai, Shaykh Eissa Kharafeen (protect), said on July 20 that there will be no security or stability in the Sinai without peace between Palestinians and Israelis and development of job opportunities in the North Sinai Governorate. During our meeting with Kharafeen and other tribal shaykhs in Kharafeen's diwan in Egyptian Rafah, Kharafeen explained that the Government of Egypt (GoE) has taken great effort to control the smuggling of goods, weapons, and people from Sinai to Gaza and Israel. However, he stated that GoE's "hand of steel" approach on the border and in Bedouin areas will not stop smuggling because "poverty leads people to take great risks." Kharafeen stated that young men "risk their lives" to work in smuggling because they have no other viable financial alternatives and they find ways around increased security including paying off the "right people." He told us that providing Bedouin men with a "dignified" way to earn a living can put a natural end to smuggling. Kharafeen's solution is to supply water into the Bedouin areas of central Sinai to create opportunities for the agricultural and animal husbandry industries to grow.

¶14. (S/NF) Gamal Selmy (protect), a member of the Fawakhriya Bedouin Council and the El Arish local council said on July 19 that the GoE approach to Sinai was focused on "how to get rid of the Bedouin problem," not how to create economic opportunities to eliminate problems. Both Selmy and Sameh Atta (protect), the chief advisor to the SYG of the Fawakhriya Bedouin Council pointed out the North Sinai Governor, city Merkaz chiefs, security officers, and judges

are all appointed by Cairo, and come from the Nile Valley. Atta added that the Governor is a "military man" with a "security orientation," and does not understand economic development. According to Selmy, the GoE perceives all the Bedouins as "spies" and the aim is to use a "heavy-handed" approach to "control" them. He said that Bedouin resent this approach and are looking for opportunities to "embarrass the GoE" in the eyes of the world.

Development in central Sinai

¶15. (C) Kharafeen stated that a water line was needed in central Sinai as there is "no development or stability without water." He asked for the U.S. to support the extension of the Ismailia Canal to central Sinai. The land slopes down so cost would be reduced and a one meter wide pipeline could meet the demand needed to create the agricultural and animal husbandry industries, according to Kharafeen. He understood that the USG is prepared to spend USD 50 million to stop illegitimate smuggling, and he stated that the provision of a water line is the best way to accomplish this. (Note: USAID believes that extending the pipeline would actually cost a multiple of USD 50 million and yield questionable economic value. End Note). Kharafeen declared that wells are too costly and provide too little water to solve the problem. He said that help with water usage technology such as drip irrigation and plastic for greenhouses would increase the effectiveness of a water pipeline.

¶16. (C) Selmy and Atta support U.S. development efforts in northern and central Sinai. (Note: The Fawakhriya Bedouin council is working as a sub-grantee on its proposal to educate Sinai women on the Egyptian political process. End Note). However, Selmy expressed skepticism that "current" USAID projects would change the mentality in central Sinai. He said that current projects may lead to jobs that will allow Bedouin to make thousands of dollars, but smuggling means millions of dollars. He encouraged the USG to think of development projects that will create livelihoods to support their large, extended Bedouin families. (Note: USAID's current USD 10 million Life Sinai project has job creation as

one of its objectives. Drawing on the USD 50 million allocated by the FY 09 supplemental, USAID plans to devote much more substantial resources to job creation, particularly for youths. End Note).

Security Worsening in El Arish

¶ 17. (C) Selmy and Atta said that recent Egyptian efforts to scale back the heavy security presence around Rafah and El Arish had created a "permissive environment" that led to an increase in Bedouin criminal activity. Selmy told us that central Sinai Bedouin, in the pursuit of economic livelihoods, were involved in daily carjackings that had the inhabitants of El Arish "living scared." Atta said that the Bedouin involved in smuggling are the best armed and strongest group in the North Sinai. Selmy stated that central Sinai Bedouin have an "informant network" in El Arish that "tips them off" to security actions and potential carjack victims. Both Selmy and Atta said that central Sinai is increasingly being governed by traditional tribal law, which is creating "a state within a state." Atta said that this was leading people to rely on "tribal politics" and was creating a "divided populace."

Growing Apathy

¶ 18. (C) Selmy told us that the July 12-19 elections for local NDP units were a failure. He said that many areas did not even have enough candidates to fill all the open slots, let alone conduct elections. Selmy sees this "political apathy" as a dangerous sign because the young are not participating in the political process, but are looking for other outlets to express their "disgust." Atta said that another sign of apathy was the increase in rubbish being thrown into the city streets. He said that the Fawakhriya Bedouin Council had purchased a trash compactor and was beginning to encourage people to dispose of their rubbish in an "environmental manner."

U.S. Role

¶ 19. (S/NF) Kharafeen stated that there are big hopes that the U.S. Administration will change the situation in Sinai. He said that people in Sinai expect the U.S. to bring peace and development to the region, establish a Palestinian state, create an Egyptian democracy, and stand for justice. Selmy and Atta believe that the USG has considerable influence on the GoE. They praised the U.S. role in attempting to provide development assistance and encouraged the USG to push for a change in the way that the GoE deals with Sinai and the Bedouin population. Both stated that the U.S. is "trusted" to do the right thing and opined that development projects with a "U.S. face" will encounter no opposition from the local populace.

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